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SUBJECT: Religious Leaders Call for Action on Reform

REF: (A) Nairobi 714 (B) Nairobi 753

UNCLASSIFIED - ENTIRE TEXT.

¶1. Summary. In recent months religious leaders have been exerting strong leadership to press President Kibaki and Prime Minister Odinga to implement the reform agenda. The religious leaders have enormous influence with the Kenyan people, and thus are a positive force in urging peaceful pressure on the coalition to carry out reforms. End summary.

¶2. Reftels report on the Ambassador's meetings with the Catholic Episcopal Conference and the National Council of Churches. Outreach to religious groups is part of our broader effort to energize them, civil society, the private sector, and the media to exert pressure for implementation of the reform agenda.

¶3. Even before the Ambassador's most recent meetings with them, the religious groups have been exerting strong leadership. The Inter-Religious Forum is an umbrella group of many religious groups and played a key role last year in mobilizing the Kenyan people to insist on a political settlement. The Forum recently issued a strong message through full page advertisements in the newspapers. The Forum warned that "tribal hatred" is rampant, and declared that "political leaders in Kenya have been the greatest threat to peace and prosperity." The Forum castigated politicians, saying that "you have continued to divide Kenyans along ethnic lines to win political office. You have bribed; intimidated, incited; (and) manipulated." Referring to Parliament, the Forum stated that "you have increased your salaries and allowances and refused to pay taxes like the rest of the people." The Forum praised the media for exposing corruption scandals and airing the views of the people. The Forum, however, also called attention to unscrupulous elements of the media which thrive on sensationalism. "Stop sacrificing ethical and professional standards on the altar of increasing your profit margins," the Forum said. The statement warned President Kibaki and Prime Minister Odinga that religious leaders are concerned with the way they are leading the country. Kenyans, the Forum statement declared, "are discouraged, ashamed, disillusioned, and angry." The Forum told Kibaki and Odinga that they have made "little or no effort towards healing and reconciliation." There has been no effort to unite Kenyans of different ethnic backgrounds, they stated. They castigated Kibaki and Odinga for failing to fight corruption and for lack of action against extra-judicial killings, among other issues. The Forum called on the two leaders to "take responsibility" to follow through on the commitments they made when signing the coalition agreement.

¶4. On April 6 the Anglican Archbishop and the Catholic Cardinal expressed serious concerns about divisions within the coalition government, and urged the two to work together to carry out reforms for the good of all Kenyans. Collapse of the coalition government, they warned, would be disastrous for the country. The two religious leaders also called for Kibaki and Odinga to consult more with the youth of the country.

¶5. Comment. Religious leaders, including Muslim leaders, are exerting strong leadership to urge Kibaki and Odinga to follow

through on their commitments to reform. They have enormous influence with the Kenyan people, and are a positive force in rousing the conscience of the nation and mobilizing peaceful pressure for implementation of reforms. We will remain in close contact with them. End comment.

RANNEBERGER